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SUBJECT: OBASANJO MOVES TO IMPEACH ATIKU

Classified By: Political Counselor Russell J. Hanks for Reasons 1.4 (b and d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Late on September 6, the results of an investigation requested by President Olusegun Obasanjo into alleged corrupt practices by Vice President Atiku Abubakar were presented to Senate President Ken Nnamani with a request to the Senate to take "appropriate action." The assumed action would be impeachment proceedings against the Vice President and could cripple his campaign to succeed Obasanjo. The President's initiative is also viewed as another attempt to extend his term and postpone or confuse elections as well as an effort to ensure that Atiku is unable to mount a credible campaign for the Presidency. This report comes as an initiative is already underway to impeach the President for over 100 impeachable offenses. It is too early to predict how the competing impeachment moves will play out, but an unintended consequence of Obasanjo's effort could unite and revive the anti-third term coalition and encourage action against the President. For the moment, though, neither of the impeachment moves appear to have enough support in the National Assembly to succeed. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) Late on September 6, the results of an investigation requested by President Olusegun Obasanjo into corrupt practices by Vice President Atiku Abubakar were presented to Senate President Ken Nnamani with a request to the Senate to take "appropriate action." The report, presented to the Council of State on the same day, was submitted to the President on August 24 by Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) chairman Nuhu Ribadu. The investigation is related to accusations against the Vice President circulating for several months that he diverted \$110 million from the Petroleum Technology Development Fund to personal use. On his behalf, the Vice President has consistently maintained that "the President authorized the transfers" and that the funds were used to support Obasanjo and Atiku in the 2003 elections. The Vice President was asked to leave the Council of State meeting shortly after it began over two hours late on September 6 so as not to serve "as a judge in his own case." The President, in his letter to the Senate, said the investigation was initiated "at the request of the (U.S.) Federal Bureau of Investigation.

¶3. (C) Contacts at the National Assembly have confirmed that the press reports were "substantially accurate," but caution that the report does not necessarily signify impeachment proceedings. "The press is jumping the gun," one contact said. Contacts also cautioned that the Senate could not deal with the matter until the end of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (currently underway in Abuja). Other names linked to the accusations include Mohammed Babangida, son of former head of state and current presidential candidate Ibrahim Babangida, and a businessman linked to both Obasanjo and Atiku, Chief Mike Adenuga.

Virtually all of Embassy's contacts among Senators and staff at the National Assembly view the investigation as part of the President's plan to extend his term past May 29, 2007, and to postpone or confuse the electoral process. It also could cripple Atiku's campaign for the Presidency, apparently a priority for Obasanjo.

¶4. (C) This report comes as an initiative is already underway to impeach the President for over 100 impeachable offenses. Discussed since the collapse of the efforts to amend the Constitution earlier this year, this impeachment move is being organized by the Vice President along with a coalition of other Senators against the third term and tenure elongation. This group has not submitted documents to initiate the process yet, but organizers say that they had planned to launch the effort this month.

¶5. (C) COMMENT: This move can be seen as another step by Obasanjo to make sure his Vice President is unable to succeed him. It could also serve to hinder the presidential ambitions of Babangida. Observers, however, are discussing it as an attack on the electoral process in general rather than on the two potential successors. It is too early to predict how the competing impeachment moves will play out and lobbying efforts and "inducements" will probably gear up in earnest within two weeks if the move is serious. In any event, one unintended consequence of Obasanjo's effort could be a re-united and revitalized anti-third term coalition that is encouraged to act against the President. Embassy's immediate assessment, though, is that the National Assembly would prefer not to create more acrimony and confusion in the polity and it appears that neither of the impeachment moves have enough support to succeed at this time.

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